

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 448 123

SP 039 635

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TITLE Embedded Preservice Teacher Education: Sophomore Multicultural Internship.
PUB DATE 2000-00-00
NOTE 10p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Consciousness Raising; *Cross Cultural Training; Cultural Awareness; Cultural Differences; *Diversity (Student); Elementary Secondary Education; Field Experience Programs; Higher Education; *Internship Programs; Mexican Americans; *Multicultural Education; *Preservice Teacher Education; Student Teacher Attitudes
IDENTIFIERS Moorhead State University MN

ABSTRACT

This paper describes the Sophomore Multicultural Internship for preservice teachers at Moorhead State University, Minnesota. From 1990-95, the program immersed preservice teachers in cross-cultural encounters and K-12 clinical experiences intended to: engender enlightened tolerance; provide an embedded context for making moral choices to pursue careers in teaching; prepare beginning teachers to address increasingly diverse groups of learners in contemporary classrooms; and affirm the connective tissue between professional education coursework and the kinds of decisions that confront teachers in diverse contexts. Each spring, sophomore preservice teachers lived, studied, traveled, and interned in the Rio Grande Valley close to the Mexican border. They served as interns within K-12 classrooms in a school district with a large population of Mexican students and teachers. They lived in condominiums inhabited primarily by local Hispanics and Mexican nationals. The internships enhanced the professional relevance of students' coursework and helped students use daily journals and team-based and large-group discussions to analyze educational contexts, reflect upon daily practice, and sense the influence of culture upon teaching and learning. The program modeled and taught habits of community by giving explicit attention to and providing structured practice for the skills required for community life. (SM)

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Embedded Preservice Teacher Education:

Sophomore Multicultural Internship

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Abstract

Moorhead State University's Sophomore Multicultural Internship in the Rio Grande Valley mirrored Robert Hutchins' contention that subjects that demand experience can be learned only by the experienced. During the years 1990-1995, the Sophomore Multicultural Internship immersed preservice teachers in cross-cultural encounters and K-12 clinical experiences intended to (a) engender enlightened tolerance, (b) provide an embedded context for making the moral choice to pursue professional teaching as a career, (c) prepare beginning teachers to address increasingly diverse groups of learners in contemporary classrooms, and (d) affirm the connective tissue between professional education coursework and the kinds of decisions that confront teachers in diverse contexts.

Embedded Preservice Teacher Education:

Sophomore Multicultural Internship in the Rio Grande Valley

Robert Hutchins argued that subjects that demand experience can be learned only by the experienced. Pointedly, Hutchins' contention underscores the difficulty, on many campuses, of teaching human relations courses to a largely homogeneous student population. In Minnesota, for example, it is not uncommon to see an entire class of students foraging for multicultural facts and principles in the absence of meaningful cross-cultural encounters.

In an attempt to provide Minnesota preservice teachers with distinctive opportunities to experience and reflect upon the world beyond the campus, the Secondary Education Department at Moorhead State University (MSU) established three multiethnic, multiracial, experiential learning programs: Student Teaching Abroad, Student Teaching in South Texas, and a Sophomore Multicultural Internship in the Rio Grande Valley. Together, these programs immersed approximately two thousand students in an essential part of liberal learning: Creating novel insights about unfamiliar people, places, and things. Moreover, these experiences sensitized preservice teachers to the criticality of teaching and celebrating a curriculum that is inclusive and inviting to minorities. As Eileen Brown (1993) has noted, "Only educational institutions which themselves incorporate the dynamics of the larger society can aspire to contribute to the recasting of that society"(p.58): A multicultural society free of the injustices of racism.

Many scholars have argued that multiracial societies depend upon a radius of trust between groups. In tandem, multicultural education programs are often premised on the assumption that when majority and minority persons interact meaningfully, prejudices

and irrational hostilities are replaced by enlightened tolerance. Moorhead State University's Sophomore Multicultural Internship in the Rio Grande Valley, for example, was designed specifically to promote increased contact between predominately white preservice teachers and a minority Hispanic culture. Additionally, both the South Texas Student Teaching Program and the Student Teaching Abroad Program were designed to cultivate an enhanced respect for other peoples and cultures. In concert, all three programs affirmed the belief that it is our diversity that lies at the core of what it means to be an educated American.

Each Spring Quarter, 1990-95, approximately twenty-five sophomore preservice teachers lived, studied, traveled, and interned in the Rio Grande Valley, just minutes from the border with Mexico. Each morning, throughout the Quarter, MSU students served as interns in K-12 classrooms in the Pharr-San Juan-Alamo School District. Additionally, the preservice teachers had frequent opportunities to engage in cross-cultural encounters with students and teachers in Mexico. Many of these encounters focused upon moral, ethical, social, and educational issues. The interns, for instance, might question their hosts' commitment to democratic principles, while the Mexican students might probe any of the current social deficits in the United States. Often the simplest of questions produced the most startling of responses. When one of the interns, for example, asked a class of university-bound students how "Mexican families treat their elders in their city of Reynosa," the reply was that there were only twenty-seven elderly persons housed in rest homes in the entire city of 500,000 people. Pointedly, these exchanges not only illuminated differences in religion, tradition, and related social features but, more

importantly, underscored how strangers learn from and teach each other in the classroom and in the community.

Another strand in the fabric of the Sophomore Internship was to provide young adults, who had only one course in professional teacher education, with a context for making the moral choice to pursue classroom teaching as a career. Against the backdrop of America's intractable social problems, the internship was intended to test each intern's commitment to the development of all of our nation's youth to meet our current and emergent national challenges. Implicitly, each preservice teacher was invited to test St. John Bosco's assertion that teaching is largely a matter of the heart. Explicitly, interns were expected to develop a richer sense of themselves, a deeper sense of their personal responsibilities in a democratic society, and an illuminating sense of their "love for their chosen lives" (Brownlee, 1993, p. 61).

To deepen the intern's understanding of the values that sustain community and society, students were housed in attractive, secure condominiums inhabited predominately by local Hispanics and Mexican nationals. Poolside and courtside, the interns had frequent opportunities to practice their evolving competence in conversational Spanish, while experiencing and reflecting upon a multiethnic society as an integral part of their education. On weekends, students traveled to historic cities like Guadalajara and San Luis Potosi and scaled the mountains of Real de Catorce to experience the wonderment of the venerated image of Saint Francis of Assisi.

Unlike many campus-based activities, these students were immersed in a multicultural drama, not just reading about it. Today, these young teachers are not only better educated to live in an increasingly diverse society but also better prepared to

address the increasingly diverse groups of learners in the nation's K-12 classrooms. Moreover, because faculty in the Department of Secondary Education rotated the responsibility for the supervised clinical training experience in the Rio Grande Valley, it deepened their own knowledge of educational, cultural, and linguistic contexts.

In addition to studying conversational Spanish and participating in their school-based internship, the interns completed required courses in the MSU professional-education sequence: Human Growth and Development, Educational Psychology, Measurement and Evaluation, and Cultural Pluralism. These courses were taught poolside each afternoon by resident Moorhead State University faculty. The interns created self-selected, self-managed, and self-motivated teams of four persons. All of their team learning activities and performance assessments were intensely collaborative. As students assumed the responsibility for their own learning, they subjected their presentations, journal entries, and analyses to peer constructive criticism.

Predictably, the internships served to enhance the professional relevance of students' coursework. Outwardly, students' academic coursework carried the same course titles as on campus, but contextually the academic experience was far more engaging and exhilarating for several reasons. First, students were often able to apply that knowledge to practical tasks in their field experience, thus initiating skills that must ultimately be learned in practice. Secondly, interns were able to sense and appreciate the connective tissue between education coursework and the kinds of decisions that confront teachers in diverse contexts.

Specifically, the structured internships permitted students to use daily journals and team-based and large-group discussion to analyze educational contexts, reflect upon

daily practice, and sense the influence of culture and context upon teaching and learning. And because resident faculty were able to provide professional guidance for this clinical learning, the internship proved to be an excellent means of illuminating "teaching knowledge" in a contextualized fashion. Relatedly, students' clinical experiences restored the mystique of being a teacher by revealing that teaching is, as Max van Manen (1984) asserts, more than simply "mastering a systematic set of teaching skills and classroom-management technologies, which when once mastered, take the mystery out of teaching children" (p. 147).

When members of the Wingspread Group on Higher (American Imperative, 1993) wondered aloud if "next year's students will graduate as individuals of character more sensitive to the needs of community, more competent to contribute to society, and more civil in their habits of thought, speech, and action" (p. 12), they implicitly framed and focused the need for dynamic learning experiences like the Sophomore Internship. In tandem, they circumscribed the core purpose of the collegiate residential life.

In the broadest sense, the Multicultural Internship in the Rio Grande Valley addressed three endlessly-evocative questions:

- What kind of people do we want our children and grandchildren to be?
- What kind of society do we want them to live in?
- How can we best shape our institution to nurture those kinds of people and that kind of society? (Bowen, 1982, p. 9)

Finally, the Internship Program modeled and taught the habits of community by giving explicit attention to and by providing structured practice for the skills

required for community life, with the overarching goal of deepening the radius of trust between groups in pursuit of a just and inclusive society.

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